

**No. 116. An act relating to foster parents' rights and protections.**

(S.189)

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. FOSTER PARENT WORKING GROUP; REPORT

(a) Creation. There is created a Foster Parent Working Group to recommend legislation, rules, or policies, or any combination thereof, pertaining to rights and protections for foster parents in Vermont.

(b) Membership. The Working Group shall be composed of the following nine members:

(1) the Commissioner for Children and Families or designee;

(2) the Deputy Commissioner for Children and Families' Family Services Division;

(3) the System of Care Manager in the Department for Children and Families' Family Services Division or designee;

(4) a representative of the Vermont Foster and Adoptive Family Association;

(5) a representative of Voices for Vermont's Children;

(6) a person previously in foster care in Vermont, appointed by the Governor;

(7) the Chief Superior Judge or designee; and

(8) two fosters parents from different regions of the State, appointed by the Governor.

(c) Powers and duties. The Working Group shall examine the relationship between foster parents, the Department for Children and Families, and the court system to assess whether any laws, rules, or policies should be amended or implemented to better support the work of foster parents, including the following:

(1) access to the Department for Children and Families on evenings and weekends;

(2) access to the Department for Children and Families' records about a particular foster child or foster family;

(3) scheduling court-ordered visits and appointments with the Department for Children and Families;

(4) fear of reprisal for refusal of a placement or raising concerns about the Department for Children and Families or the foster care system; and

(5) any regional differences identified in the State's foster care system.

(d) Assistance. The Working Group shall have the administrative, technical, and legal assistance of the Department for Children and Families.

(e) Report. On or before January 15, 2017, the Working Group shall submit a written report to the House Committee on Human Services and the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare with its findings and any proposed changes to law, rule, or policy.

(f) Meetings.

(1) The Commissioner shall call the first meeting of the Working Group to occur on or before September 1, 2016.

(2) The Working Group shall select a chair from among its members at the first meeting.

(3) The Working Group shall cease to exist on January 31, 2017.

(g) Reimbursement. Members of the Working Group who are not employees of the State of Vermont and who are not otherwise compensated or reimbursed for their attendance shall be entitled to both per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses pursuant to 32 V.S.A. § 1010 for no more than three meetings.

Sec. 2. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on July 1, 2016.

Date Governor signed bill: May 17, 2016